

COASTAL CONSERVANCY

Staff Recommendation
September 8, 2005

CAYUCOS STAIRWAYS

File No. 05-037
Project Manager: Timothy Duff

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Authorization to disburse up to \$150,000 to the County of San Luis Obispo for reconstruction of five beach access stairways in the town of Cayucos.

LOCATION: Studio Drive, Cayucos in northern San Luis Obispo County (Exhibit 1).

PROGRAM CATEGORY: Access

EXHIBITS

Exhibit 1: Regional Location Map

Exhibit 2: Aerial Site Map and Sample Project Photos

Exhibit 3: Letters of Support

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS:

Staff recommends that the State Coastal Conservancy adopt the following Resolution pursuant to Sections 31400, *et. seq.* of the Public Resources Code:

“The State Coastal Conservancy hereby authorizes the disbursement of an amount not to exceed one hundred fifty thousand dollars (\$150,000) to the County of San Luis Obispo (County) for reconstruction of several beach access stairways in the town of Cayucos subject to the following conditions:

1. Prior to the disbursement of funds for construction of each project, the County shall submit for the review and approval of the Executive Officer of the Conservancy:

- a. Evidence that the County has obtained all necessary permits and approvals, and all other funds necessary to complete the project.
- b. A final work program, including final construction drawings, a final budget, schedule, and names of any contractors and subcontractors to be employed for these tasks.
- c. A signing plan for the project acknowledging Conservancy participation.

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- d. The projects shall be consistent with the Conservancy's "Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development."

2. The County shall manage and maintain the stairways for safe public access for a period of not less than 20 years."

Staff further recommends that the Conservancy adapt the following findings:

"Based on the accompanying staff report and attached exhibits, the State Coastal Conservancy hereby finds that:

1. The proposed projects are consistent with the purposes and objectives of Sections 31400 *et. seq.* of the Public Resources Code regarding coastal access.
2. The proposed projects are consistent with the Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted by the Conservancy on January 24, 2001.
3. The proposed projects serve greater than local needs."

PROJECT SUMMARY:

The County of San Luis Obispo proposes to reconstruct five existing but deteriorating beach access stairways in the unincorporated town of Cayucos, and is requesting \$150,000 in grant funds to match \$75,000 in county funds for the project. In the early 1980's the Conservancy provided funds to the county for the construction of these and other beach accessways in Cayucos, and over the past 20 years these heavily used stairways have been actively managed and maintained by the county for public access to some of the county's finest state beaches. According to county engineers, however, after nearly 20 years of exposure to the nearshore environment, the structural integrity of several of the stairways has degraded to a point where one or more of them will have to be closed to the public unless rebuilt within the next 12-18 months (Exhibit 2). If the proposed grant funds are approved, a condition of the grant agreement will require the county to fund ongoing maintenance of the new stairways to ensure that they remain open and safe for public access for another 20-year period.

The beaches in Cayucos are a highly popular destination for visitors to the central coast region, and the Coastal Conservancy has a long history of actively supporting the county's commitment to develop access to and along its beaches. Approving the county's funding request would reaffirm the Conservancy's original commitment made over 20 years ago to actively support the county's ongoing efforts to operate a network of safe shoreline accessways.

Site Description: The accessways are fronted by Cayucos State Beach within the residential neighborhoods of southern Cayucos, an unincorporated town in northern San Luis Obispo County located north of the City of Morro Bay (Exhibit 1). Morro Strand State Beach is immediately adjacent to Cayucos State Beach, and together these two state beaches offer over four miles of contiguous sandy beach stretching from the Cayucos Pier south to "The Rock" at the mouth of the Morro Bay Harbor. Each of the stairways to be reconstructed features

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panoramic vistas of Estero Bay and the open ocean, and each is served by plentiful on-street parking and garbage pick-up.

Project History: In 1983 the Coastal Conservancy provided grant funds to the County of San Luis Obispo to construct five beach access stairways in Cayucos to serve visitors to Morro Strand State Beach. Since then, the county has regularly invested staff resources and county general funds to maintain these accessways as required by our grant agreement. Today, although a number of these stairways are in good condition, numerous others will require substantial reconstruction in order to keep them open and safe for public use.

Conservancy and County staff toured the project area in May 2004, and identified the highest priority stairways in need of major reconstruction. In August 2004 Conservancy staff requested and received from the County cost estimates to complete the proposed work. In December 2004 Conservancy staff confirmed that partial funding was available for the proposed project, and in April 2005 the County confirmed that it would be able to provide the needed matching funds to complete the project.

PROJECT FINANCING:

Coastal Conservancy	150,000
County of San Luis Obispo	<u>75,000</u>
Total	\$225,000

The expected source of Conservancy funds for this project is the Conservancy's FY 2003-4 appropriation from Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Fund (Proposition 40). Consistent with the purposes of this funding source, the proposed project would be carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Conservancy's enabling legislation, and would serve to establish public coastal accessways to and along the coast that would serve greater than local needs. Proposition 40 also requires the Conservancy to give priority to grant projects with matching funds (Public Resources Code Section 5096.651), and this project is supported by matching funds.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ENABLING LEGISLATION:

Public Resources Code Section 31400 directs the Conservancy to have a principal role in the implementation of public accessways to and along the state's coastline. To this end, Public Resources Code Section 31400.3 authorizes the Conservancy to "provide such assistance as is required to aid public agencies and nonprofit organizations in establishing a system of public coastal accessways, and related functions necessary to meet the objectives of this division." Funding the reconstruction of these accessways is consistent with these provisions as well as with Section 31400.1 which authorizes the Conservancy to award grants to a public agency for purposes of developing lands suitable for, and which can be used for, public accessways to and along the coast, when the subject accessways serve greater than local needs. The project would serve the recreational needs of visitors from outside the project area, including those arriving from inland areas.

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The proposed project is consistent with the Local Coastal Program of the San Luis Obispo County as described in the Consistency with Local Coastal Program Policies below.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL(S) & OBJECTIVE(S):

The project is consistent with the Conservancy's Strategic Plan as follows:

Consistent with **Goal 2 Objective D**, the project would increase coastal recreation opportunities for residents and visitors, and correct dangerous conditions.

Consistent with **Goal 3 Objective B**, the project would increase and promote tourism and public access to the state beaches fronting the town of Cayucos.

CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S PROJECT SELECTION CRITERIA & GUIDELINES:

The proposed project is consistent with the Conservancy's Project Selection Criteria and Guidelines adopted January 24, 2001, in the following respects:

Required Criteria

1. **Promotion of the Conservancy's statutory programs and purposes:** See the "Consistency with Conservancy's Enabling Legislation" section above.
2. **Consistency with purposes of the funding source:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
3. **Support of the public:** This project has the support of State Senator Abel Maldonado, Assemblyman Sam Blakeslee, and the County of San Luis Obispo. See Exhibit 3 for letters of support.
4. **Location:** The proposed projects would all be located within the coastal zone of northern San Luis Obispo County.
5. **Need:** Closure of these accessways would impact public access to the area's popular beaches. Conservancy funding is needed to match the funding provided by the grantee.
6. **Greater-than-local interest:** The proposed projects would serve residents from throughout San Luis Obispo County as well as visitors traveling to and along the central coast who travel to the popular State Park beaches fronting the town of Cayucos.

Additional Criteria

7. **Leverage:** See the "Project Financing" section above.
8. **Readiness:** The grantee has agreed to provide the matching funds necessary to complete the proposed project by the summer of 2006, and has already begun work to complete the necessary permitting.
9. **Realization of prior Conservancy goals:** "See "Project History" above."

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CONSISTENCY WITH CONSERVANCY'S ACCESS PROGRAM STANDARDS:

The project, as designed, is consistent with Conservancy's Standards and Recommendations for Accessway Location and Development as follows:

Standard No. 1 Protect Public and Coastal Resources

Each existing stairway to be reconstructed has been designed and located to minimize alteration of the natural landforms and to protect environmentally sensitive habitats of Morro Strand State Beach and its upland bluffs. The proposed work would serve to prevent unwarranted hazards to public safety.

Standard No. 2 Correct Hazards

By funding the proposed reconstruction to the over 20 year-old stairways, the project would serve to reduce existing hazards associated with the damaged and/or worn out structures and dangerous beach access.

Standard No. 5 Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Each existing stairway to be reconstructed has been designed and routed to protect environmentally sensitive areas of Morro Strand State Beach and its upland bluffs.

Standard No. 8 Trails

Reconstructing the existing stairways would serve to connect visitors to several miles of sandy beach, and would feature appropriate materials, adequate trash receptacles, benches, and signs.

Standard No. 9 Scenic Overlooks

One or more of the accessways would include blufftop overlooks to provide the public with views of the beach and coast and would be accessible to those with physical disabilities.

Standard No. 12 Support Facilities

The accessways would include support facilities including trash receptacles, benches, and signs and would serve visitors to the area's wide sandy beaches.

CONSISTENCY WITH LOCAL COASTAL PROGRAM POLICIES

The project is consistent with the County of San Luis Obispo's Estero Planning Area Local Coastal Plan Land Use Element (revised November 2004) which recommends the development of public shoreline access facilities in the project area. Specifically, the county is to "develop and maintain public walkways to the beach along Studio Drive and Pacifica Avenue."

COMPLIANCE WITH CEQA:

The proposed reconstruction of existing stairways is categorically exempt from the provisions of CEQA under California Code of Regulations Section 15301 which exempts the repair of existing facilities including pedestrian trails and similar facilities when the project involves "negligible or no expansion of use beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination." The proposed reconstruction of several existing stairways involves no expansion of use. The project is

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also exempt under California Code of Regulations Section 15302 which provides a categorical exemption for “replacement or reconstruction of existing facilities where the new structures will be located on the same site as the structure replaced and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structure replaced”. The subject stairways will be located on the same sites as the structures replaced or reconstructed and will have substantially the same purpose and capacity as the structures replaced. Upon approval, staff will file a Notice of Exemption.